THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

DIGITAL

SALES

LEADERSHIP

Strategy, Sponsorship, Motivation, Assessment & Training

digital
marketing
institute

Introduction

The digital age has introduced technologies and tools that have transformed the selling landscape. As a result, the traditional ways of selling are struggling to have the impact they once had as customers flock online to purchase.

In light of these changes and with digital transformation now more of a necessity than a choice for global organizations, sales leaders are looking to exploit new channels to generate leads and tap into the networking potential of the digital world.

> 90% of decision makers admit to never answering a seller's cold call.

A huge part of the digital sales phenomenon is social selling through established networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. The flow of information on these networks is growing at near exponential rates according to Sales for Life's infographic as every minute sees 290,000 Facebook posts, 350,000 tweets and 100 hours of video uploaded to YouTube. And these figures just continue to grow...

But why should sales teams be trained in using these digital channels? The simple fact is that digital selling appears to work. Social selling leaders have reported 45% more opportunities per quarter while 51% are more likely to hit their quotas than their non-social selling peers. When it comes to leads captured, those from inbound marketing cost 60% less than traditional forms of lead generation and result in social selling pros exceeding their quotas 23% more often than their digitally naive colleagues.

As a leader looking to grow sales and increase revenue, consider the following steps to help you and your team to drive the digital transformation of your organization.

Plan Your Strategy

Digital selling is more than a sales enablement program, it is a survival strategy in a burgeoning digital economy. As Social Selling Evangelist Jill Rowley stated:

"The internet is the most disruptive force I've seen in my lifetime. Sales functions are undergoing a massive transformation out of sheer necessity. The reason they're transforming, is in direct response to the fact that the buyer is transforming. It's a case of sales essentialism; adapt to survive."

This disruptive force has not only changed the way we connect, but also how we sell. Rather than relying on a cold-calling culture, sales leaders need to train their team to become trusted guides that can build and nurture relationships online. To achieve this a digital selling strategy needs to be created that support the business goals and objectives of your organization. Often, digital strategies fail due to the mismatch between business and digital directions.

"The internet is the most disruptive force I've seen in my lifetime. Sales functions are undergoing a massive transformation out of sheer necessity. The reason they're transforming, is in direct response to the fact that the buyer is transforming. It's a case of sales essentialism; adapt to survive.

Jill Rowley

Social Selling Evangelist & Startup Advisor

In order to ensure the success of your strategy, which will create the foundation for your team's digital selling program consider the following questions:

- What are the priorities for your company, amongst executives, senior management, your team etc.?

- What are the key objectives of the strategy e.g. goals and aims? Could a mission be established to drive it?

- Do you know the current and predicted innovation, market & industry trends? If not, do you know where to find them?

- Have you knowledge of your competitors? Were they the first to market in your industry with a digital selling program? If so, what did they do and what did it achieve?

- Most importantly, do you know the digital maturity of your organization? Is there a digital awareness across the organization or will some education be required? Is there buy-in from the top down?

Bear in mind, that a digital strategy has a shorter life-span than others due to the rapid pace of digital. Therefore, an initial 2-3 year plan can provide a grounding for any initiatives with a view to reviewing it when there are changes to the micro and macro environments that will require you, your team and organization to adjust the digital goalposts.

Recruit an Executive Sponsor

In recent years, the role of an 'executive sponsor' has become well accepted and even ubiquitous in organizations. Aside from playing a huge role in a project's success, Author & Organizational Transformation Expert, Ron Ashkenas believes that effective sponsors can be worthwhile for senior executives as they oversee key initiatives that are important to the company and CEO.

> The role of the sponsor is to "make sure the project's goals are aligned with overall company strategy, garners support (and overcomes resistance) from other senior executives, and provides ongoing direction as the effort unfolds."

Ron Ashkenas, Author & Organizational Transformation Expert

With that in mind, ensure the sponsor of your choice is not only respected in your organization with some level of influence, but understands the goals and outcomes of the digital selling program. This will ensure that executive goals align with your program objectives and will go some way to securing board approval.

As a leader, you need to involve a sponsor early in the process and leverage any current wins to gain support (e.g. results of an internal digital selling pilot program, industry data, quotes from experts, insights). By promoting these results along with industry statistics, you can establish the credibility of the program to your sponsor and arm him/her with hard data to persuade and influence.

Motivate by example

If you want to build an effective and empowered digital selling team, you need to set the example by establishing a digital presence. Cultivating a persuasive personal brand will help cement you as a thought leader by personalizing your engagement with current and future networks. These key elements will allow you to lead by example and motivate your team to follow suit.

CREATE A SOCIAL FOOTPRINT

This stage requires you to be strategic. Select digital channels that provide the best fit for you and your organization (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) and learn how to use them. Next, decide what you want areas of interest you want to represent or be known for. The best tactic is selecting one or two issues that you have some level of expertise in and curate and create content relevant to those areas of expertise. Finally, populate those platforms with an executive profile and presence using a professional photo, selecting custom URLs to use across all platforms, write a personalized biography aligned with your company's ethos alongside creating and sharing high-quality leadership content.

Finally, populate those platforms with an executive profile and presence using a professional photo, selecting custom URLs to use across all platforms, write a personalized biography aligned with your company's ethos alongside creating and sharing high-quality leadership content.

Microsoft

Microsoft boosted sales productivity by **38%** with its social selling pilot program centered on Sales Navigator and grew their social selling program from **15 sellers to over 3,000** in less than 2 years

CRAFT ORIGINAL CONTENT

In this ever-evolving digital age, consumers are bombarded with a huge amount of information. This glut has resulted in short attention spans and an intolerance for ill-informed content. To become a thought leader you need to generate self-written content that stands out from the crowd. This could be through a blog, video, images, infographic or whitepapers, but it should reflect your areas of expertise and an angle that is unique to you in order to drive engagement. If curating your own blog is too time-consuming, consider using existing platforms such as LinkedIn Pulse, the microblogging network Tumblr or the community platform Medium.

CONNECT WITH INDUSTRY & CLIENT EXECUTIVES

While creating an online presence is not an easy task, the rewards will make all the work worth it. Once you have established an online presence and shared both original content and relevant curated content, customers, peers and industry should begin to engage and react.

EXPERIMENT WITH NEW TACTICS & SHARE BEST PRACTICE

As the digital innovator in your organization, don't be afraid to turn your hand to new platforms to see what gains traction amongst customers and peers. This knowledge will not only help focus your digital selling strategy through learning what works, but enable you to share the experiences with your team and create best practices for your organization.

Assess & Train Your Team

With a strategy, executive sponsor and digital presence in place, the next thing to consider is your team. The digital maturity of your organization plays a huge role at this stage as you need to understand the capabilities of your staff and the organization as a whole. For example, do you know the digital skills and knowledge that already exists in your team? Do you know the skills that are lacking that may stand in the way of digital selling success?

If not, then this should be a priority as you move your selling strategy from traditional to digital. Assessing the digital knowledge of your team can be achieved through an external digital diagnostic tool such as the one developed by the Digital Marketing Institute. By identifying the gaps in your team's skillset you can take measures to fill those gaps through training and development initiatives that will deliver ongoing training as you build out and shape your program.

> SAP estimates their social selling program has been responsible for over $4 million in revenue

For application software leader SAP their Instruct training program proved the key to their digital selling program's success. By offering train-the-trainer workshops, on-demand tutorials and videos along with social selling workshops, the company empowered the digital know-how of their team. Within just a few months of launch, their sales pipeline increased by more than 40% and the program was expanded to 500 users in Inside Sales and Marketing. To date, the company estimates their social selling program has been responsible for over $4 million in revenue.

As a leader, the training and development of your staff is paramount to the success of your team. The pace of digital means that things change quickly. In most cases quicker than many organizations can keep up. Implementing a training program that develops the digital skills of your sales team will address the knowledge gaps and provide continuous learning in an ever changing industry.

However, knowing the right digital skills to train your team is no easy task. A digital expert can guide and support you and your organization to provide relevant learning that qualifies your team to a standardized digital selling level. For example, IBM reached a turning point in 2014 when they realized the fate of their sales pipeline was now controlled by the buyer rather than their sales representatives. Their solution was to empower and educate their inside sales team through a customized digital selling program. As a result of the program, 80% of sellers revealed that the training will or has increased their selling abilities, while 84% felt the program will help them perform better in their job.

Offering ongoing training will not only impact on your sales team, but also the workforce as a whole. Sharing this knowledge on a company-wide level will help develop organizational maturity and create a formidable pool of engaged thought leaders.

The role of a successful leader is to inspire and empower. To become one in digital selling requires understanding and embracing the many tools and channels that digital presents and supporting your team and organization in using them. Applying these vital steps will steer the success of your digital selling program and set the digital standard for your organization and industry.

Transform your staff into digital selling superstars!

As traditional selling methods are no longer enough to sustain success; digital tools and techniques are now an essential component of any efficient selling strategy.